DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 229 974 EC 152 538

AUTHOR Weiser, Tracy Ellen
TITLE Designing Structured Leisure Programs for Emotionally Handicapped Adolescents.
PUB DATE Apr 83
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual International Convention of The Council for Exceptional Children (61st, Detroit, MI, April 4-8, 1983).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; Elementary Secondary Education; *Emotional Disturbances; Extended School Day; *Leisure Time; Program Development; *Recreation; Recreational Activities; *Recreational Programs; Therapy

ABSTRACT

A therapeutic recreation program in the Montgomery County Public Schools, Maryland, for 24 emotionally handicapped students (grades 5 through 12) provides extended day services within a public school setting. The program was designed to meet seven goals: providing structured activities beyond the regular school day, reinforcing the students' individualized education programs, increasing students' self esteem, providing opportunities for greater interaction with peers, increasing skill levels in an assortment of leisure activities; stimulating use of constructive leisure activity as an outlet for release of energy, and increasing an awareness of and participation in community recreation programs. The diverse recreation offerings match seasonal changes as well as individual needs and interests. The program incorporates continuous assessment, evaluation, and documentation of individual's leisure functioning, of program goals, and of interaction between staff and students. Individual assessment leads to placement in specific activity groups, which may be adapted forms of team or individual sports or games. Difficulties inherent in such an approach include lack of information about therapeutic recreation among educators and the public and the school system's inflexible hiring procedures. (CL)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED229974

# Designing Structured Leisure Programs for Emotionally Handicapped Adolescents

Tracy Ellen Weiser
Recreation Therapist
Mark Twain School
14501 Avery Road
Rockville, Maryland 20853

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Tracy Weiser

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EC152536

Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the
Council for Exceptional Children
61st, Detroit, MI, April 4-8, 1983

## Designing Structured Leisure Programs for Emotionally Handicapped Adolescents

### Introduction

My presentation today focuses on the design and implementation of a therapeutic recreation program for emotionally handicapped students in the public schools. The therapeutic recreation process and the program's background, purpose, population, activites and evaluation techniques will be described and illustrated in a slide presentation.

### The Background and Nature of Mark Twain School

I would like to begin by giving you the overall background of the Mark Twain School, including its purpose and the population served. I am one of the two half-time recreation therapists employed by the Montgomery County Public School System. I was hired three years ago to work in the Extended Day Program at Mark Twain School in Rockville, Maryland. Mark Twain is a public school which opened in February, 1982. The school is specially designed and staffed to serve youngsters of average intelligence who, because of learning or behavior difficulties, are unable to function effectively in their local schools. Mark Twain accommodates approximately 475 students in grades five through twelve. The school's overall purpose is to provide an individualized education program to assist students in developing academic skills, self-organization and appropriate social

interpersonal skills. The goal is to return students to regular public school settings and to help them to become responsible and productive citizens. Mark Twain teachers function not only as instructers but also as advisors who help students to problem-solve more effectively.

In September, 1980, Mark Twain School initiated the Extended Day Program, a therapeutic recreation program unique to the county school system. This program was established to provide a continuum of recreation services to those youngsters who were placed at Mark Twain after the private school they attended closed; these students had previously participated in a program of leisure activites as an extension of the school day.

The Role of Recreation in the Schools

The precedent for providing a recreation program within the schools is "Public Law 94-142" or the "Education For All Handicapped Children Act of 1975." This act clearly identifies recreation as a related service within special education, akin to speech pathology and audiology, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, and medical and counseling services. Recreation is defined as including these four components: 1) assessment of leisure functioning; 2) therapeutic recreation services; 3) recreation programs in school and community agencies and; 4) leisure education. These four recreation services are authorized to be provided if the youngster's Individualized

Education Plan (or IEP) determines that they are necessary in order for the child to benefit more fully from special education.

However, the concepts of leisure education and the process for adapting it to the education systems are new and mysterious to educators. We are a society based on the "Puritan Work Ethic." We have only recently recognized the growing importance of leisure fulfillment as automation and technology have decreased our personal job satisfaction and increased our available free time. Thus, the traditional view of leisure as a concept antithetical to work needs to be reevaluated by all of us.

Constructive use of leisure time and independent functioning in leisure pursuits are especially important for people with disabilities since they must cope with "enforced" leisure due to their disability or to discrimination in the job market.

Mental health and special education professionals have recognized the value of recreation for the disabled. As Richard Kraus stated in 1973, "Like all people, the disabled have a right to self-expression, social involvement, creative experience, and the other important values that can be provided by recreation... they and their families are tax payers; thus, they should also be served fully by public agencies...many disabled individuals find most aspects of a 'normal life', such as the opportunity to complete their education, marry and have a family, enter a profession and earn a livelihood or travel freely, closed to them." (Kraus 1973: 30-31) A correlation has been made between leisure

functioning (rather than job performance alone) and the disabled population's ability to adjust to community living rather than being institutionalized. One of the past presidents of the American Psychological Association, Alexander Reid Martin, wrote that "...in most instances of psychoses and neuroses the earliest and most unamenable signs and symptoms are distrubances in natural recreative functioning..." (Kraus 1973:23)

Recreation services can be related to traditional educational goals. The educational philosopher John Dewey as well as the child development specialists Parten, Erikson and Piaget, recognized the use of play activities to help youngsters progress along the developmental continuum toward cooperative play and appropriate social behavior. Games and play situations are often the first experiences children have which require them to adhere to set rules and to group sanctions. Games have the power to motivate severely handicapped youngsters and to thereby increase their communication skils and maturity level. The San Francisco Recreation Center for the Handicapped initiated recreation activities in the 1950's which resulted in their clients' improving sufficiently in physical, social, emotional and self-help skills. Their maturity levels improved enough for them to be accepted into public special education classes. Structured play activities can reinforce readiness, motor and academic skills. The opportunity to participate in extra curricular activities which regular students enjoy is often

unavailable in special education centers. A therapeutic recreation program within the school can provide the opportunities for positive recreation involvement, group membership, and social interaction.

The Purpose and Organization of the Extended Day Program

Now that I have explained the rationale for incorporating a recreation program into a public school setting, I would like to explain the goals and format of the Mark Twain Extended Day Program. We have formulated these seven goals:

(1) To complement existing Mark Twain education programs by providing structured activities beyond the regular school day.

(2) To reinforce students' Individual Education Plans.

(3) To increase self-esteem by focusing on students' strengths and interests.

(4) To provide opportunities for increased peer interaction and development of more appropriate and responsible social skills.

(5) To increase skill levels in an assortment of leisure activities.

(6) To stimulate the use of constructive leisure activity as an outlet for release of energy.

(7) To increase an awareness of and participation in community recreation programs.

We attempt to meet these goals by preparing a diverse program of recreation activites which coincide with seasonal changes and individual needs and interests. Activities are planned to provide fun and a consistent structure. Included are sports, swimming, table games, tournaments, arts and crafts,

parachute games, outdoor activities, nature hikes, and cooking. Movies and special events are scheduled weekly. These include Halloween scarecrow making, apple bobbing, face painting, egg decorating, and birthday celebrations. Periodic field trips are scheduled to expose students to the available community resources.

Our program serves a population of 24 students referred to our program by teacher recommendations and parental requests. The criteria for referral are that the youngster: 1) lacks positive relationships with peers and/or adults; 2) demonstrates a lack of developed social skills; 3) exhibits an inability to resist personally destructive peer pressure; 4) is unwilling to accept constructive criticism from peers and/or adults; 5) is exposed to constant family stress; 6) is not involved in at least one constructive after school activity; 7) has not integrated appropriately into the neighborhood peer group; 8) shows evidence of an unstructured home environment in the afteroon hours; 9) demonstrates a need for extended structure to surpass the regular school day; and 10) demonstrates an inability to structure his or other leisure time.

The program is scheduled five days a week for an hour and forty minutes. Bus transportation home is provided. Students are divided into four activity groups of three to six students each. Students generally participate in two forty minute activites per day.

The Extended Day Program is staffed by two half-time recreation therapists and seven aides who work two hours per day, five days per week. We also recruit students from the local universities to work as volunteers, field work students and interns each semester. This has proved quite successful as both a training program for the university students and as an opportunity to continuously reassess and renew the program activities by incorporating fresh energy and ideas.

Assessment, Evaluation and Documentation

I would like to return to the previously mentioned concept of recreation service which includes the assessment of leisure functioning and the provision of therapeutic recreation services. The element that makes the Extended Day Program a therapeutic recreation program rather than merely a recreation program is the continuous assessment, evaluation and documentation of individuals' leisure functioning, of the program's goals and activities, and of the staff/student interactions.

Individual assessment begins with the student's referral form, where the teacher indicates the reasons for recommending the student, the social-emotional goals targeted for that student from the Individual Education Plan, and the student's activity interests. Additional information is recorded on an assessment form, including family and education history, medical problems and prescribed medications, psychological test results, and

strengths and needs of the youngster. The recreation therapists also interview each student and the parents to outline the program format and expectations, to answer questions and to assess how the youngster currently uses after school free time. The student also completes a more detailed activity interest checklist.

After the initial assessment process, students are placed in specific activity groups according to interests, needs and behavioral compatibility. Some youngsters are not ready to participate in group activities and are programmed into individual activities all or part of the day until they demonstrate ability to function with one or two other peers. The participants' responses to program activities and the staff/student interactions are evaluated daily in a staff meeting following the program; at this time changes are made in peer groupings and/or activity selections based on the daily observations and analysis of behavior problems.

Weekly documentation is kept via anecdotal records written in individual folders and this information is passed on to the teachers. After an initial evaluation period of three to four weeks, the individual is evaluated on a Social Assessment Measurement Scale (SAMS). A second followup evaluation is done at the end of that school semester utilizing the same scale. This scale was developed specifically for our Extended Day Program in order to target ten areas of development including: 1) attitude; 2) communication skills; 3) group interaction; 4)

following directions; 5) sharing and taking turns; 6) attention span; 7) acceptance of authority figures; 8) ability to form individual relationships; 9) frustration tolerance and impulse control; and 10) intimidation and self defenses.

An important aspect of our programs is motivation and behavioral expectations. When we accept new students into our program, we stress that the purpose is for participants to have fun and to learn how to get along better with their peers. While the Extended Day Program activities vary from those during the school day, the behavioral expectations are similar. We do not allow physical aggression, verbal intimidation or abusive language. We encourage youngsters to assert their feelings in a positive way. Many of our participants are socially immature, demonstrate very low tolerance for frustration and cannot handle competition. We, therefore do a great deal of problem-solving with youngsters, encouraging them to verbalize dissatisfaction or anger, to identify its source, and to think of alternative ways for handling these feelings and resolving upsets. When a student becomes disruptive or dangerous to the rest of the group, he or she is temporarily isolated from the activity. We are also using a daily check system to motivate and to reinforce students' cooperative behavior and productive participation. Each student can earn a check for each of these categories midway through the days program, and at the end of the day. Two checks entitles the individual to a snack before leaving. Checks are totaled daily

and a certain number is required in order for each participant to earn a special privilege such as a sundae or pizza, a fishing trip or an afternoon at an arcade. This privilege is generally earned every other week. Certificates and prizes are also awarded periodically to encourage participation.

Another important aspect of our program is the adapting of activites. A typical team sport such as football or volleyball may seem overwhelming, too competitive or overstimulating to our students. We therefore modify games by playing for shorter periods of time, reducing the playing feild or using different equipment. In volleyball, for instance, we might substitute a beachball or large cageball, and in badminton we use oversized racquets and birdies. Sports activities generally consist of providing an open gym period where climbing ropes, tumbling mats, basketballs, badminton racquets and weight lifting equipment are available for use and the staff interacts aggressively to involve students in activities. Structured games occur periodically as youngsters demonstrate greater interest in and ability to tolerate organized team sports. Novelty is important and we encourage students to channel energies constructively by inventing games and obstacle courses using mats, scooter boards, cageballs and nerfballs.

Activities are planned with goals in mind. One of our most popular offerings is a cooking group, designed to stimulate group cooperation and the ability to follow sequential directions, as

well as to provide tangible evidence of the benefits of group membership, and a sense of accomplishment.

Current Issues and Future Projections

While I feel strongly that a therapeutic recreation program can be a valuable and vital component of a special education program, certain problems arise. The first difficulty, which is the basis for my being here today, is that most educators, as well as the general population, have little idea of or exposure to what therapeutic recreation is. We need to work together as professionals to understand how our specialties can compliment each other. A great deal of valuable information is exchanged during a cooking session or crafts activity; a child's reaction to his or her team's losing a point in volleyball is a good indication of his or her ability to tolerate competition and frustration. This data needs to be shared with teachers as well as incorporated into the child's Individual Education Plan. As we all are aware, staff meeting time is extremely limited. Thus, I often find myself writing notes to teachers or talking to them during a class, instead of being included in the scheduled team meetings, as occurs in psychiatric and rehabilitation settings.

In addition, the school system is less flexible in hiring non-certified part-time employees. We have difficulty locating staff who are qualified to work with seriously emotionally disturbed adolescents as well as to lead assorted recreation

activities, particularly for a mere ten hours a week. Budget cuts have eliminated our planning and training time with our recreation aides, so we have to depend on their willingness to stay over an extra fifteen to thirty minutes daily in order to process activities and to plan ahead. On the other hand, we have found that aides who are in the classroom teaching at 9:00 a.m. arrive in our program at 1:45 p.m. tired and prone to burn out. Our most successful route to finding skilled, motivated employees has been to recruit and to train university field work students as volunteers, and to then hire them.

Another problem has been obtaining referrals for students who can profit from a therapeutic recreation program. Since we are a public school, we must serve all students. We sometimes receive referrals from parents who essentially want a babysitter - their youngsters do not want to be involved in such a program, or are not ready to handle a group social setting, and create power struggles between staff, parents and themselves until they are able to work their way out of the program. We, therefore, try to screen and to evaluate students in order to select those students who are needy but who have some degree of motivation.

Another component of our therapeutic recreation program which I hope to see developed in the future is liaison with community recreation professionals and programs. As our participants enhance their leisure and social skills, they need to be exposed to and mainstreamed into available community

activities among their peers. This element of a leisure education program is crucial to successful adjustment to and acceptance into the community.

In summary, my presentation today has attempted to give you a better understanding of what therapeutic recreation is and of how a program can be structured to fit the needs of emotionally disturbed youngsters.

## References

Kraus, R. Therapeutic Recreation Service - Principles and Practices, Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Company, 1973.